

Center Director's Safety Bulletin

Mission To VPP Still On Course For Year 2003

July 2, 2001

Calendar of Events

JULY

Engineer for Safety

July Safety Training

July 9, 2001

Crane Operations and
Rigging Refresher

July 12, 2001

Forklift Safety
Refresher

July 10-13, 2001

Construction Safety

July 18, 2001

CPR

Contact the
Learning Center at
3-2996 for a video
on "Job Hazard
Analysis"

Expired Safety Permits

Does it matter if a safety permit expires in a facility or research operation as long as there are no safety violations present? If the facility has been operating safely for years is a permit necessary? Does the permit exist for symbol or substance? Recently, these and related questions have surfaced in discussing the Glenn Research Center's (GRC) Safety Permit System. However, before addressing such inquiries, the reason for obtaining a permit needs to be answered.

The Safety Permit System has been in use at GRC for most of the Centers' operational existence. The permit system and associated Area Safety Committees, which conduct safety permit reviews, function rather effectively and provide a level of engineering control that contributes to the overall safety of personnel, research, and facilities. The peer review of each permitted facility and operation enables difficult and sometimes extremely hazardous experiments to be adequately controlled, and the inherent risks mitigated through proper engineering analysis and design, documentation, and operator qualifications.

Much like a driver's license affords the owner the privilege to operate his/her vehicle, the safety permit exists as a license for the requester to conduct operations, and displays to GRC personnel that a proper engineering review has occurred and associated hazards are being controlled. Currently there are nearly 600 active safety permits of record at GRC.

NASA holds the safety of personnel and facilities in the highest regard, and the use of the permit system actually predates the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) of 1970. This law was enacted "to assure so far as possible every working man and woman in the Nation safe and healthful working conditions and to preserve our human resources.... (29 USC 651 *et seq.*)." The permit system is but one element that GRC implements to comply with this law and, even prior to legal precedent, NASA recognized the need to competently address hazards in the workplace.

So then what does it say if a safety permit expires and is left hanging on the facility door? What message do we send when the permit expiration date is 1 month or 1 year past due? Does anyone care? Yes! Most certainly, yes! GRC employees want to walk out the gate in the same manner in which they entered at the start of the day (i.e., same number of fingers, toes, hands, etc.). In general, folks care deeply that they have safe working conditions and a level of assurance exists that when the day is done they can return home to their families. The permit on the facility door informs the employees what hazards are present and what safety standards must be followed when entering. An expired permit can be perceived as an indication of a lowering of our standard for safety.

The expired safety permit is analogous to the "broken window" theory. Noted UCLA Political Science Professor James Q. Wilson developed this theory for law enforcement, and briefly it states that if things such as windows are allowed to stay broken (or if graffiti is not removed or abandoned cars are not towed away), it sends a signal that no one cares about a community and crime will increase until the community is in chaos. Just as a broken window can speak volumes about a community, an expired safety permit can send a signal to personnel, especially non-NASA employees, that safety is just a buzzword, a flavor-of-the-month management initiative.

Recently, there was a vehicle collision on the Lab. No one was seriously injured, but it turned out that one of the participants was driving without insurance. Local law enforcement (Fairview Park) cited the individual for driving without the proper state required insurance, and now additional recrimination is due him for driving on GRC property without insurance. Did the lack of insurance prevent this individual from driving? No, but he operated his vehicle without insurance and now a much larger

REMEMBER: Mission Success Starts with Safety

Expired Safety Permits (Cont'd)

penalty awaits him. As safety professionals, it concerns us that if a serious incident should occur how would GRC be perceived if the facility in which the incident occurred was operating without a valid safety permit? What additional penalties would arise if we knowingly allowed operations with an expired permit?

Due to many factors, expired permits still exist in facilities, however, GRC has set a policy in place regarding the permit system, and it is to the benefit of all that they adhere to this policy (i.e., **do not operate without a valid safety permit**). It is certainly permissible for requesters to ask for an extension to a safety permit while awaiting renewal. Working with the Area Safety Committee Chairs and the Glenn Safety Office (GSO), a plan can be developed that addresses any concerns for safety, schedule or cost, and with due diligence by all parties, the number and frequency of expired permits should decrease. GSO, as a support organization, and the larger safety community are available to assist the research and operations communities in fully completing their assigned programs.

As GRC prepares for OSHA's Voluntary Protection Program's (VPP) Star certification, the attention to detail on all aspects of our Safety Program, not just safety permits, will need to be thoroughly reviewed and considered. GRC has a proud safety record (prior to a mishap in February, the Center logged over 1.7 million man-hours worked without a lost time incident), and we should take pride in a job well done by all. Our commitment to the Agency Safety Initiative (ASI) and our vigilance in providing a premier Safety Program will ensure that GRC receives the VPP Star award.

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